

# The Gatekeeper

For more than a decade, Brunswick Senior Advisor Kate Fall was one of David Cameron's closest advisors. Over that stretch, Ms. Fall was, according to *The Times*, "the most influential woman in British politics." • In March, HarperCollins published *The Gatekeeper*, Ms. Fall's memoir with a title inspired by the nickname she earned working at No. 10 Downing Street—no desk was closer to the Prime Minister's office than hers. • Offering a behind-the-scenes look at everything from the EU Referendum to the art of advising leaders, *The Gatekeeper* also hilariously delves into the less-glamorous aspects of a life lived at the heart of power. Some feel strangely relatable. In the following excerpt, for example, Ms. Fall explains the frustration of navigating conference calls with world leaders.

**N**O. 10 NEVER SLEEPS, OR TAKES A HOLIDAY. ALONG with the colony of mice who enjoy the freedom of its corridors at night, are people working shifts—monitoring emails, answering phones, guaranteeing the security of the current prime minister—ready for every eventuality. These people are part of what makes the place so unique.

Chris Martin, who will become David's principal private secretary after Jeremy Haywood leaves to become Cabinet Secretary, likes to call it "the House" (he calls the machine of government "the System"). This seems a strange way of dehumanizing the efforts of many people, but it fits with the sense of duty and public service of the people who work here.

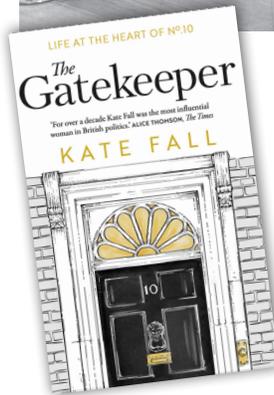
In "the House" lives the famous No. 10 switchboard, or "Switch." This refers to the diligent (mostly) women who operate the house switchboard 24/7, 365 days a year, Christmas included. They work shifts and have beds upstairs, operating in an almost wartime atmosphere of duty and camaraderie.

"No. 10 Switch here," they say, in their now virtually extinct 1950s BBC English. They can get hold of anyone, anywhere on the planet, keeping a whole range of numbers for any one individual (mothers, aunts, friends), but they will never, never, give out a number. I have tracked down the most random people across time zones through Switch. They also plagued my life for six years. Constant calls at all times of days and night, so many walks round the park where I have held my phone to my ear, half talking to my children, half listening to some foreign leader discussing world peace with David.

An excerpt from Brunswick Senior Advisor **KATE FALL'S** memoir pulls back the curtain on her time at No. 10 Downing Street.

Switch offer a bewildering set of options for communicating. There are conference calls, one-to-ones, calls which I am invited to speak on and calls which I am simply supposed to listen in to. In the beginning, I am not sure which is which. David on the call to a head of state: "patched in," or in other words, listening only. David on the call with his team: free to speak. More complicated is a call from David to, say, Nick Clegg [Deputy Prime Minister from 2010-2015]. Here, I have a great deal to say—their conversation is going seriously off kilter—but find I am unable to speak. I complain to David how frustrating it is not to be able to interrupt his weekend conversation with Nick. "I cannot tell you how relieved I am you can't!" he says.

Ed [Llewellyn, the former Downing Street Chief of Staff under Cameron] accepts the mute button when it comes to calls with foreign leaders but finds it frustrating nonetheless. He starts giving David advice through a series of notes (when David is in



Kate Fall's new memoir chronicles life at No. 10 Downing Street. Above, Ms. Fall joins David Cameron and George Osborne in a bar at Davos 2010.

the office) or emails (when he isn't). "You're talking too much," Ed often writes. On a call with [German Chancellor] Angela Merkel, the note comes through: "Be more charming!" David replies, "Just piss off."

There is even a strict etiquette to how the calls are set up. Switch start with the most junior. Last on the line is the most senior. You cannot ignore your place in the pecking order; Switch will gladly remind you. Doing a large(ish) conference call this way means people hanging on the line for quite a while as everyone is tracked down. Then finally, "Prime Minister on the line," Switch announce chirpily, and everyone stops gossiping, or whispering to their children to leave them alone. ♦